

# Communication called crucial to population issues in towns

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ANTIGONISH – An observer of trends in small towns says there is no easy answer to problems caused by population erosion.

But David Bruce, director of the rural and small town program at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, is a believer that communication can provide some of the solutions to address out–migration.

"Communication is absolutely right," he said after a workshop on sustaining rural development during the second International Conference on Gross National Happiness.

"If there isn't a sense that people can talk to one another in a community, you're not going to get any idea about where the community should go in the future."

This can include making young people in the area feel appreciated, which Mr. Bruce said can encourage them to return to their hometowns to set up business after receiving a post–secondary education.

Another situation he said may need to be addressed is how some rural areas counteract the lack of resources that are available in urban settings.

For example, if public transit is not readily available to people in small towns, Mr. Bruce said a group of citizens could step in to organize a shuttle service operating on a not–for–profit basis to assist the elderly.

But a certain degree of bureaucracy is involved in this form of volunteerism, Mr. Bruce said, which is why government agencies need to be a guide to available resources.

"Our argument is volunteers need assistance to function like a business," he said.